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ABSTRACT

It is proposed that the reading-machine laboratory provides a means for the classroom ESL instructor to continue using his present method in the classroom (intensive, theoretical-grammatical instruction) while providing additional extensive reading and learning practice with the machines in the reading laboratory. Two speed reading systems currently on the market are found to contain materials well suited to adult ESL instruction. Adjustments in speed expectations and careful selection from the large amount of material available in the programs are recommended. A reading program designed for college-bound ESL students and emphasizing comprehension skills is outlined. The facility requirements are given, and the controlled reader is the primary equipment recommended. Applications of the suggested instructional materials are described. (MSE)

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Reading Laboratories: The Conversion of the

Speed Reading Lab into an ESL Reading Lab.*

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Astract: In this paper theoretical and practical information is presented showing ways and reasons for converting a speed reading laboratory into an ESL (normal speed) reading laboratory. Methods and materials are evaluated and discussed in view of their usefulness for improving reading, listening, lexical and learning skills of college-bound ESL students.

*Parts of this article were discussed in a paper delivered by the author at the JALT Conference in Tokyo, Japan, in October, 1981.

With the influx of foreign students to the US, many campuses had to take a closer look at the effectiveness of their ESL programs. The large number of recent articles on new methods of second language instruction gives some indication of the extend of the inquiry. Reading acquisition has emerged as a major problem area and has given rise to a controversy over intensive vs. extensive methods of ESL reading instruction. The argument has yet to be resolved whether ESL students should first master linguistic structures before being exposed to a wider range of reading materials. The underlying reason for the dispute is surprisingly simple: Both sides are genuinely alarmed about the slow rate of learning in conventional ESL programs and are therefore searching for solutions to this dilemma. Only two articles will be cited here. These have been singled out not for representing two opposing positions but rather for identifying those problem areas for which this paper is proposing solutions.

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Gloria Paulik Sampson, realizing the limitations of intensive instruction, advocated in "A Real Challenge to ESL Methodology" (TESOL Quarterly, 11,3. Sept. 1977), that ESL students should "be exposed to structures numerous times from different points of view at various points of time in the curriculum. Continual use of the structures, however imperfectly used by the students, would be emphasized; and mastery would come, as in the case of native speakers of English, after extensive rather than intensive use of the structures by the students" (p. 246).

Joanne Kalnitz and Kathy Reyen Judd made a significant contribution to the understanding of reading problems in their article, "An Approach to Teaching E.S.L. Reading to Literate Adults" (TESOL Newsletter, 15,5. Oct. 1981). They identified the following problem areas: student's tendency "to focus on the word as the unit of meaning instead of looking beyond the word to the sentence, paragraph and the entire text They stop at each unfamiliar word They end up spending more time looking up words than they do reading the text [They] have unrealistic expectations of how much they should be able to understand Finally, many ... students read aloud or subvocalize which slows them down and may inhibit comprehension" (p. 15). Remedies proposed by these authors require intensive classroom work practicing the outlined problems.

This paper submits that the reading-machine laboratory provides a solution which allows the classroom instructor to continue using his/her present method in the classroom (intensive, theoretical-grammatical instruction) while providing additional extensive reading/learning practice with the reading machines in the reading laboratory. The laboratory programs recommended in this paper address themselves to and practice all the points which were raised by Sampson as well as by Kalnitz and Judd, including the practice of critical reading skills and of English language rhetorical devices. Therefore, the reading lab programs can serve admirably to complement these classroom recommendations by

the latter while providing at the same time the extensive practice called for by the former.

For this reason the following paper advocates making the reading lab an integral part of TESOL; it ventures to predict that in the future the reading lab will become as important a component of second language instruction as the aural/oral laboratory is today.

Two speed reading systems are on the market today which contain materials well-suited for ESL adult instruction: The Educational Developmental Laboratories of McGraw Hill Book Co. (EDL) and the Instructional/Communications Technology, Inc. (I/CT). The materials already available can serve as starting points for ESL reading programs and are excellent in every way, pedagogically, conceptually and technically. EDL and I/CT systems feature hardware and software which are compatible and which can be used interchangeably. Since I am more familiar with EDL, my observations are based primarily upon experience with the EDL program. This in no way reflects a preference for EDL over I/CT.

Existing programs were designed for an American student audience and for the improvement of reading speeds to levels above 200 words a minute. However, in ESL we are dealing with foreign students who wish to read at the rate of normal discourse, e.g. about 150 words per minute. It is therefore important to carefully choose only those programs which are appropriate for an ESL audience and which assure the results desired in an ESL instructional framework. This paper will make specific recommendations which are based on 3 years of observation and experimentation with the reading lab in an intensive ESL program for foreign college students.

EDL and I/CT have programs for reading grades K through 14, that is Kindergarten through 2 years of college. One series, "Learning 100," was created for teaching language arts to undereducated adults and to adult Americans with

English as the second language. The latter program (referred to as AA, BA, CA or Hi A, Hi B, Hi C, etc.) is usually considered to be the best program for TESOL, because it deals with adult subject matter. I found, however, that its ESL usefulness is limited--mainly at the lower levels.

A program which was designed for the adult American student tends to use idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms quite freely. A foreign learner who uses such a program is prematurely introduced to linguistic difficulties which are inappropriate, particularly at the lower levels. On the other hand, the regular programs (A to 14) are much better from a linguistic point of view, although the content is somewhat simplistic (child-oriented) at the lowest levels. However, in either program there are so many reading selections to choose from that the ESL instructor will have no problem finding enough selections appropriate for his particular audience and purposes. Most of the selections are of broad cultural interest and deal with a wide variety of subjects, such as science, history, literature, and contemporary issues.

The reading program outlined in the following pages is designed for ESL students who are preparing for college level work in English. Such students typically possess some theoretical knowledge of basic English grammar and vocabulary. However, they typically lack comprehension skills both in reading and understanding words and structures in the textual context (see also Kalnitz/Judd). We found that the reading laboratory instruction as outlined below was surprisingly successful in overcoming the comprehension problem. Within a minimum of time students were able to activate the existing (often dormant) compartmentalized knowledge and then to build upon this foundation very rapidly the reading/studying skills necessary for working with American college level materials.

In the reading lab students get exposed to a large volume of graded texts,

presented at a pace controlled in such a way that it does not allow for translation. At first, reading materials should therefore be well below a student's real level of proficiency. The initial emphasis can then be placed upon comprehension and on increasing the speed with which basic structures and familiar words are understood within different contexts. Once a student has acquired fluency of comprehension at his own level, s/he then usually advances quite rapidly to more complex materials.

An important feature of the available reading programs is systematic attention to the development of general learning skills. In addition to the acquisition of linguistic and reading comprehension skills, students acquire academic skills which are indispensable for successful study of any academic subject in a U.S. college, mainly the mastery of thought processes such as identification of main ideas, drawing of conclusions, classifying, making inferences and following directions. The students' power of concentration will increase dramatically; they will improve their study habits and their ability to evaluate their own performance. Most importantly, their motivation to achieve and to succeed will increase markedly.

The physical requirements (room) for a reading-machine laboratory are quite modest. If a speed-reading lab is already available, it probably has ten or more stations with an equal number of reading machines (controlled readers) and cassette players. In that case, no changes or additions need to be made. Otherwise, a regular size classroom with sufficient electrical outlets can easily be converted into a reading lab. We found that five reading centers were adequate in most cases. Each center should consist of a table, four chairs, a controlled reader, and a cassette player with four or five earphones. Of course, storage space will be necessary to accommodate equipment, books and student records. Class size should be kept under twenty, if at all possible, so

that students can be grouped in units of one to five, each unit working together at one of the centers. (The number of centers can be increased indefinitely according to the availability of funds and the size of classes).

Small ESL programs are usually faced with the problem of dealing with students whose English language proficiency varies greatly. The reading laboratory is particularly well suited for them because it permits considerable flexibility within a single class situation in the placement and in grouping of the students. Generally speaking, students can enter the program at their own level and can progress at their own rate of learning. Most of the materials are designed for self-instruction. A single teacher can therefore provide each student with personal guidance as needed in the course of each lesson. This is a real asset when teaching heterogeneous groups of students.

The core of any reading lab is the controlled reader (CR). The controlled reader is a filmstrip projector used for visual training in reading by projecting the printed text onto a screen line by line, phrase by phrase, or word by word. The controlled reader needs no installation, and its operation is extremely simple and safe. The machine can also be transported in a carrying case or on a rolling cart, in case there is no special room available for a Reading Lab.

The controlled reader has two main features. The speed at which the filmstrip of text advances can be varied from a very slow 20 lines per minute to the very fast 130 lines per minute. A line of filmstrip usually consists of five words per line. Thus 20 lines per minute equal 100 words per minute. The filmstrips can be projected line by line or in segments of a line. The latter feature is crucial for the ESL program. It controls the amount of line exposed at any given time by allowing a moving slot to illuminate one part of the line after another in a continuous motion from left to right, left to right. This method forces the student to proceed along the printed line at a steady,

predetermined rate without the possibility of stopping for less familiar words, regressing or leaping forward.

The sweeping motion from left to right helps strengthen and train the eye muscles for quick coordination from left to right and from the end of one line on the right hand side of the text to the beginning of the next line on the left. This feature is particularly important for the student whose native script progresses from right to left or from top to bottom, as in Japanese and Arabic.

The target speed in ESL teaching should be 30 to 40 lines per minute; this speed corresponds roughly to oral discourse (approximately 150 words per minute.) In any case, the speed should be fast enough and the degree of textual difficulty challenging enough to command the student's undivided attention and concentration. Whenever a student scores 90% to 100% correct comprehension at any given level, s/he should advance to the next higher level rather than increase the speed beyond 30-40 lines per minute, as would be done in a speed reading class with native speakers. It is imperative to remember that the objective in ESL is not one of reading faster but rather of reading at higher and higher levels of textual difficulty and complexity at a normal speaking speed of 150 words per minute.

Controlled readers come in two sizes; the larger projector is designed for use with an entire class, and the smaller junior model (JR) for small groups around a table or for individual use in booths. In addition, McGraw Hill now offers a new cartridge-type model. The latter is not only considerably more expensive than the others; its texts appear in slightly smaller print. My students found this to be a disadvantage whenever more than one student had to read with the same machine. However, if enough money is available to purchase machines for individual use (15 or 20), then the cartridge model looks very attractive. Because of less wear and tear it is probably more economical in

the long run. The I/CT model is one third less expensive than the McGraw Hill EDL junior reader, but it is built less solidly.

The CR activities are supplemented by vocabulary exercises with the so-called Flash-X and Vu-Mate cards. The vocabulary introduced at each level is correlated throughout the total system and is practiced in all activities of a given level. The Flash-X machines, from McGraw Hill, have a set of disk cards with printed vocabulary for each level. These instruments are used to train visual memory at tachistoscopic speed and to practice spelling of the new vocabulary. Each student uses the small hand tool whenever s/he has a few minutes of extra time. It is surprising how much students enjoy this type of vocabulary and spelling exercise and how eagerly they practice this activity.

The Vu-Mate is I/CT's vocabulary trainer. It is rectangular, not round like the Flash-X and not as handy as the disks. However, it is very useful for those classes in which all students share the same native language. The reason is simple: Since the words on a square card are printed in column, there is space on either side of the column to add the foreign equivalent (e.g., Japanese.) This cannot be done on the round disks of the EDL Flash-X system.

So far in this paper the EDL system and the I/CT system have been discussed jointly since both are based on similar concepts and ideas. The following pages will introduce separately a number of programs from these two companies (i.e., software) which have proven most suitable for ESL instruction. Some characteristic features will be discussed in order to explain how and where to use these programs in the ESL curriculum.

The EDL Controlled Reader Fluency Training program is especially well suited for those students who wish to improve only their general (silent) reading skill; it serves mainly to give extensive reading practice. The texts are presented in two ways: on filmstrips to be read with the controlled readers and in student

workbooks with vocabulary preview sections and reading skill exercises. The filmstrip reading is followed by self-graded comprehension tests in the workbooks. A student who has successfully completed level HA, the highest level of the "Learning 100" program, will be able to start reading college level textbooks. Successful completion means to be able to read the H-level text at a speed of 40 lines per minute with a comprehension accuracy of approximately 90%. The Controlled Reader Fluency Training program has no aural/oral components and teaches one skill only, silent reading.

Both EDL and I/CT offer general developmental programs which teach different skills simultaneously: reading, listening, critical and lexical skills. These programs combine the use of CR filmstrips, cassettes, workbooks, and vocabulary builders. The program offered by either company is for preparing college-bound students to read textbooks, follow lectures and understand instructions and discussions in English and are, in my view, very well suited to supplement and support general ESL programs.

EDL produces the Controlled Reader Skill Development Program. It teaches, as the name implies, reading and studying skills in a systematic fashion. Among the reading comprehension skills taught are critical, interpretive and analytical reading skills (e.g., understanding main ideas, using context clues, making inferences, recognizing fact and opinion, finding cause-and-effect relationships, comparisons, classifications and many more.) Each lesson starts with an oral introduction to the lesson on a cassette, demonstrating a specific skill (i.e., classification.) The skill is then exemplified within the context of the actual reading selection (filmstrip). It is later tested in the form of written multiple-choice questions and also in oral questions on the cassette, followed by a discussion of the correct answer. Finally the student is advised to review the entire story orally by listening to it on the cassette while reading along in his workbook. We found this program both helpful and popular,

The content of the stories varies widely and touches on many different topics; from climbing Mt. Everest to discussing contemporary issues of pollution or nuclear energy. Readers and speakers on the cassettes have all kinds of regional intonations (not dialects), are males and females, and give dramatic as well as straightforward readings. This program is therefore excellent for improving listening skills in addition to reading skill development.

The EDL Controlled Reader Skill Development Program (SD) is not available in the adult "Learning 100" series. The content of the lowest levels of the regular program is inappropriate for adult learners. ESL teachers are therefore advised to omit the first three levels and to start with skill development only after their students have attained enough competency to read level D texts (fourth level).

Experience has shown that students respond best if they are introduced to one new lab activity at a time. It is advisable to introduce them first to the controlled reader reading program, levels B and C (or BA and CA), and to familiarize them thoroughly with filmstrips and controlled readers. By the time they reach level D, or the fourth level, they are ready for introduction to the skill development programs with their oral/cassette element.

During a typical one-hour class session students can complete two units, one from the CR program on the controlled readers and another from the SD program, with reading and listening from the same level of difficulty. In addition they will be able to spend a few minutes during each session on the vocabulary cards (Flash-X). This three-pronged approach has proven remarkably effective and produces very rapid progress.

The comparable I/CT program, Critical Reading and Listening (CRL), is arranged somewhat differently. First of all, it is available for adult learners, even at the lowest levels. Secondly, it is also available in

different academic subjects (e.g., history, science, social studies, and literature.) Each level consists of five synchronized elements: the CR filmstrips, study guides (workbooks), CRL units, cassettes, and vocabulary builders. Each lesson starts with a dictionary type of introduction to the new vocabulary in the workbook. The student then works through the text in two ways: s/he listens to the first half of the story on the cassette and then reads the second half with the filmstrip. S/he can vary the procedure by reading the whole text in his workbook with or without listening simultaneously to the reading on the cassette.

The skill development aspect is relegated to a separate Critical Reading and Listening kit, a kind of skill card--answer key system (similar to S.R.A.) without filmstrip or cassette support. The kit is quite useful for independent study. Its vocabulary and skill building exercises support and reinforce the other reading activities and are therefore rather important although not essential. They do not have to be done in the reading laboratory and can be used as an independent study activity.

The author has no practical experience with this program but plans to use it next semester. She will use a cross-section of subjects for different levels of language proficiency: history, science, literature, etc. Content and language, linguistic patterns and vocabulary, are sufficiently general and basic throughout, so that any and all of these programs serve the same end, namely to build a good general linguistic foundation for handling essential academic subjects at the college level.

We all know that student motivation and enthusiasm are highest when maximum leeway is allowed for making individual choices and decisions. Some students are very eager to move ahead fast and to work with more advanced students and materials. Other students want to be more secure in their

level of competence as well as in their relationship within the workgroup. It is therefore advisable to group students during the first few lab sessions in an open, flexible fashion and to allow them considerable leeway in their own choice of groups and levels. However, from the very beginning it is of crucial importance to the success of the program to keep a close check on students' achievement by monitoring their records between classes. Each student can then be given the necessary coaching--on an individual basis--concerning advancement or moving back to less difficult reading materials.

One last practical suggestion: During the lab sessions, a teacher should act primarily as a resource person, moving from group to group before and after the viewing of a new story. The instructor introduces each group to the new vocabulary and clarifies content and skill questions. It is important, therefore, to work out ahead of time a lab schedule with clear work assignments for the different tables. The groups must receive a precise work sequence for each lab session; they must know which program to begin with and how to proceed thereafter throughout the hour. The skill development program, the fluency training, and the vocabulary practice vary in length. The different groups also proceed at different reading speeds. If the sequence has been worked out carefully, each group will start out at a different time with each task. It can therefore be predicted and planned when each group will require the teacher's attention during a given lab period.

Reading lab instruction is demanding on the teacher, no matter how well prepared s/he may be. We found it helpful to assign a student assistant to the reading lab sessions, preferably an American foreign language student.

EDL and I/CT have several other programs on the market. I have tried a number of them but found them of little or no help for English as a Second Language instruction. The Audax and the tachistoscopic training materials are

useless for the educated, literate foreign student. Controlled Reader Processing Training and Comprehension Power Training are interesting and useful programs under specific conditions, but do not offer enough to warrant the extra expense and the time taken from classroom and lab instruction. Other reading and cassette programs are available; however, they either duplicate features of programs discussed above or can be done better in the traditional classroom environment. Furthermore, most of the existing reading lab programs are designed as total instructional packages, not as supplementary materials. Since this paper proposes ESL reading lab use strictly on a supplementary basis, programs recommended above are to be used only to support classroom instruction.

In conclusion, ESL instructors are urged to test for themselves the assertions made in this paper regarding the pedagogical and linguistic features and advantages of a reading machine laboratory. It is hoped that after familiarization with the existing systems, new materials specifically for ESL will soon be developed by some pioneering ESL program writers who realize the potential of reading labs in the ESL curriculum. In a few years we may all wonder why it took us so long to discover this excellent medium and its usefulness for preparing foreign students to study successfully in an American academic institution.

App. I: This page shows examples of record keeping for the whole group (4-5 students), and for individual student's records of work and progress with the Controlled Reading Program (CR), the Skill Development Program (SD) and the Flash-X Vocabulary Practice.

The Group Record can be used by the instructor for advanced planning to show each group which selection to read at a given date and what speed.

The Individual Student's Answer Sheet is used by each student for answering the multiple-choice comprehension questions at the end of the CR and SD stories. The sheet then shows to student and teacher at a glance the student's progress. A consistent score below 70% signals to the instructor that the material is too difficult for the student, that s/he works at a "frustration level" and should be given easier materials to work on. Consistent scores of 90% or above are good indices that the student should advance to the next higher level.

The Flash-X Sheet is used by each student to keep track of those Flash-X vocabulary cards which have already been studied. The circle around the number indicates which card(s) has been studied. The line following it serves to record the score (opt.). 14/18 for card 3 would indicate that the student got 14 out of 18 words correct on card 3; 16/20 means that on card number 6 the student had 16 correct answers out of 20.

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